

DRAFT

ROCKY FLATS
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
STEP-DOWN PLAN FOR SITE HISTORY/SAFETY SIGNS

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U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Department of the Interior

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ROCKY FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE STEP-DOWN PLAN FOR SITE HISTORY/SAFETY SIGNS

SUMMARY

This plan is a narrowly focused step-down management plan with a singular and specific purpose. The sole objective of this plan is to specify language for signs that will eventually be posted at all public access points to Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge (RF NWR) to inform visitors about site history and safety considerations.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

1.1 Refuge Overview

RF NWR will be established pursuant to the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge Act of 2001 (Refuge Act) (P. L. 107 - 107). The Refuge Act provides that following the environmental remediation of Rocky Flats by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), and following certification that all necessary response actions have been completed by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), DOE will transfer primary administrative jurisdiction over the majority of the site to the Department of the Interior (DOI), as RF NWR.

It is anticipated that land is likely to be transferred to DOI some time in 2007. An unusual provision of the Refuge Act required that the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for RF NWR, prior to refuge establishment. The Service finalized the CCP, following an extensive public process in April, 2005. The future refuge and its resources are fully described in Chapter 3 of the CCP, and are incorporated herein by reference (FWS, 2005)

1.2 Purpose and Need for this Plan

Public use was a controversial issue in the preparation of the CCP. Due to site's former use as a nuclear weapons production facility and the contamination that resulted from that use, many members of the public expressed concern regarding the cleanup of the site and the safety of future visitors.

Based on the best available scientific data and unequivocal determinations by the EPA and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), that the extensive cleanup program resulted in a landscape that is safe for refuge workers and visitors, the CCP provides for future public use of the site for a variety of compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities.

Goal 3 in the CCP is "Safety", and supporting Objective 3.2 is "Visitor Safety". Strategy 3.2.3 for achieving those goals and objectives says: "Provide maps and interpretive signs at all trailheads to inform visitors about the site's history, cleanup and access restrictions".

In early 2006, the Rocky Flats Coalition of Local Governments (RFCLOG) requested that the Service and DOE explain how the future refuge would be signed and what access restrictions would be applied.

The signage and access to lands that DOE will retain is a DOE decision, subject to approval by EPA and CDPHE. The Service committed to RFCLOG, that the boundary of Rocky Flats NWR would be posted with standard refuge boundary signs within 60 days of land transfer and refuge establishment, and that the Service would prepare a Step-Down Management Plan to "address language for signs on site history and safety that will eventually be placed at future public access points." The Service committed to a public process the spring of 2006 to develop this plan.

1.3 Refuge/Refuge System Purposes, Mission, Goals

1.3.1 Refuge Purposes:

Per the Refuge Act, the establishment purposes of RF NWR are:

Restoring and preserving native ecosystems;

Providing habitat for and population management of, native plants and migratory and resident wildlife;

Conserving threatened and endangered species (including species that are candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.); and

Providing opportunities for compatible scientific research.

1.3.2 Goals:

The goals of RF NWR and the Refuge System that are applicable to this plan are:

RF NWR: Goal 3. Safety: "Conduct operations and manage public access in accordance with the final Rocky Flats' cleanup decision documents to ensure the safety of Refuge visitors, staff, and neighbors."

(Note: At the time this plan is written, the referenced final cleanup decision documents have not been issued by DOE, EPA, and CDPHE. Those decisions are anticipated in the fall of 2006, and it is anticipated that this plan will be consistent with those decisions. Nothing herein can supersede the

final cleanup decisions. To the extent this plan is inconsistent with those decision documents, this plan is void.)

National Wildlife Refuge System Goal for Public Use: “To provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and man’s role in his environment, to provide Refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome, and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent these activities are compatible with the purposes for which the Refuge was established.

1.3.3 Mission Statement:

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is: "to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans" (P. L. 105-57).

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

RF NWR is completely described in Chapter 3. Refuge and Resource Descriptions, of the CCP, which is incorporated here by reference. The public can access this document via the Refuge website at: <http://rockyflats.fws.gov>.

3.0 FACILITIES

There are currently no facilities at the future RF NWR. Planned future facilities, including trails, trailheads, parking lots, access points, interpretive venues and a visitor contact station, are described in Chapter 4. Management Direction, of the CCP which is incorporated here by reference can be accessed via the refuge website above.

The CCP calls for one trail and trailhead access point to be developed and opened to the public within one year following refuge establishment and for additional trails and facilities to be developed between years 5 and 15 following refuge establishment. No facilities will be developed until an operating budget is established for RF NWR.

4.0 INTERPRETIVE SIGNS ABOUT SITE HISTORY, CLEANUP and ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

Signs with the following language will be erected at all trailheads and other public access points to RF NWR prior to the opening of those access points to visitors:

“What Happened Here?”

The land you are about to enter, Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge, is an historic Cold War site. Refuge lands are part of the buffer zone of the old Rocky Flats Plant that operated from

1951 until 1989. For nearly four decades, thousands of women and men worked here, building nuclear components for the United States' deterrent weapons that held the former Soviet Union at bay.

Weapons production at the plant involved plutonium and other radioactive and hazardous materials. The work was dangerous and secret. Over the course of decades, there were accidents. Those accidents and some of the accepted waste handling practices of the early decades resulted in releases of plutonium and other contaminants.

Beginning in 1995, many of the same Cold War veterans who had built America's deterrent arsenal, conducted an unprecedented and enormously complex cleanup project to remove contaminated buildings and soil from the landscape. They accomplished that difficult job in 2005, leaving the land as an asset for future generations of Americans.

Is the Refuge Safe?

Yes. An extensive evaluation of contamination at Rocky Flats was conducted by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). The levels of contamination on refuge land were low and met conservative state and federal cleanup standards. Both EPA and CDPHE have determined that the land is safe for public recreation and refuge workers.

There are hazards involved in any form of wildland recreation. Hazards at Rocky Flats include inclement or extreme weather conditions, the potential for trips, slips and falls; poisonous snakes; and unreasonable or illegal acts by other persons.

The refuge is open daily during daylight hours. Unless otherwise posted, stay on trails. Please observe "Area Closed" and other regulatory signs. Pets are not allowed on the refuge.

Still have questions?

For more information about the history, contamination, cleanup, or site safety issues at Rocky Flats, please call EPA at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or CDPHE at (XXX) XXX-XXXX." For information about the refuge contact (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

(Note: Appropriate phone numbers will be determined when signs are fabricated.)